

8 CIA Station Chiefs Fired in Sweeping Purge That

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CIA station chiefs in at least eight capitals have received their pink slips in a sweeping purge that may eliminate up to 1,000 members of the agency's clandestine branch by next year, qualified sources said yesterday.

They said the CIA's roving expert on Israeli affairs also will be sacked in an efficiency drive that has aroused bitter in-house resentment against Adm. Stansfield Turner, the CIA director.

Sources within and outside the agency said the station chiefs — seasoned spymasters who run operations in the field — already slated to be dropped are those in West Germany, Spain, Austria, Sweden, Norway, Canada, Japan and Australia.

"These men are what we call 'walk-upon-the-waters' types," a veteran intelligence officer said in reference to their expertise.

The field posts they are leaving are considered the top rung on a professional spy's ladder — often the last plum assignment before retirement or reassignment to headquarters in senior executive posts.

BUT THE SOURCES said only one of the eight is known to have received reassignment to the agency's headquarters to serve out his normal career term. The rest are said to have been "invited" to take early retirement.

The eight are among 210 members of the CIA's Directorate of Operations — the ultra-secret branch that runs classical cloak-and-dagger operations — who received notice of imminent severance last month.

The sources said nearly all of them will be out of the service by dismissal or early retirement by March 31. Then, they said, another 500 to 800 clandestine service employees will be slated for removal during the next fiscal year.

Although the size of the CIA's work

force is classified information, it is estimated the clandestine branch now has 4,000 to 5,000 employees — half in the field and half in support missions.

By that standard, Turner's purge would slash staff by 20 or 25 percent.

EVEN GUNG-HO intelligence professionals generally agree the Operations Directorate has been grossly overstaffed since the end of the Vietnam war, and that drastic reductions were in the works even before Turner became CIA director.

But some veterans say he has been "brutal" and "insensitive" in the way he is handling the wholesale sackings, compressing the staff reduction drive from the five years contemplated to just two.

And the critics note there is no severance pay for fired CIA employees.

Those sacked before regular retirement age get only a last paycheck, a refund of accrued pension annuities and dismissal into a world

where many employers will not hire former spies.

It is no secret that many career CIA officers — members of a close-knit fraternity — resent Turner as an "outsider" and a military man who kept his rank and brought trusted Navy aides along with him.

Some critics claim the admiral is pushing his "purge" so he can make a reputation for heroic efficiency reforms, then bow out and buck for chief of naval operations.

ALL THIS SEEMS to have spawned a somewhat spiteful anti-Navy sentiment among agency employees.

Just before the Army-Navy football game, for example, sources said "Beat Navy" signs sprouted on the walls at headquarters.

Beyond that sort of thing, however, there appears to be a serious morale problem at the CIA — an agency that has undergone four years of battering by congressional committees, investigative reporters, tell-it-all

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books by former agents and official reforms designed to curb well-publicized abuses of power.

Some intelligence officials have begun to take the once-unthinkable step of griping to reporters about Turner's policies. The agency in turn has begun to complain of "unfair" or "unbalanced" articles on the subject.

When a Newsweek magazine reporter asked Turner recently about the criticism that he is axing employees in an inhumane fashion, the director snapped, "You've really heard them crying, haven't you?"

HE EVEN SCOFFED at the notion that many of those due for dismissal had risked their lives in the line of duty, saying, "I bet you there isn't five of them that had personal risk."

By the next week Turner had cooled off and publicly expressed "regret" for this "unfortunate remark."

Official CIA spokesmen said the staff reductions are being carried out by normal attrition, as much as

possible. Where firing is unavoidable, they said, it is handled in a "businesslike" manner.

"A lot of senior people have been cut," one spokesman said. "Yes, they include station chiefs — a hell of a lot of good people."

But he said new chiefs, equally experienced, would be sent to any station involved and there would be no loss in intelligence-gathering capabilities.

The wholesale cuts, he said, were designed to allow middle-grade officers to move up and fresh recruits to be signed on.

Some of the station chiefs and many of the senior headquarters staffers slated for dismissal were about due for retirement anyway, the spokesman said.

"So what's the fuss about?" he asked. "We've had critics demanding the abolition of the CIA, now we have people out to 'save' it."